

Mythologies of the Ancient World

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**ANCHOR BOOKS
DOUBLEDAY**

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY AUCKLAND

AN ANCHOR BOOK

PUBLISHED BY DOUBLEDAY

a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.
666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10103

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Mythologies of the Ancient World, an Anchor Original, is also available in a hard-
bound edition from Quadrangle Books, Inc., 119 West Lake Street, Chicago, Illinois.

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ISBN 0-385-09567-8

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 60-13538

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FIRST ANCHOR BOOKS EDITION: 1961

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Canaanite Mythology

BY CYRUS H. GORDON

Canaan is the Syro-Palestinian segment of the Fertile Crescent, between the Mediterranean and the desert. The people speaking the Canaanite dialects included the Hebrews and Phoenicians as well as a host of small kindred nations such as the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites. Canaanite paganism is of particular importance because Biblical religion in some ways continued it, and in others reacted violently and consciously against it. Our Judeo-Christian tradition harks back, both through borrowing and reaction, to its Canaanite substratum.

The Bible is a mine of information on Canaanite mythology and religion. The more limited corpus of Phoenician inscriptions provides some additional data. Much can be learned from numerous classical sources, such as Lucian's *Dea Syra*. But since 1929, mythological texts have been emerging from the soil at Ugarit, providing us with the texts of the myths that circulated in the fourteenth century B.C.¹ Any basic study of Canaanite mythology must therefore rest primarily on the Ugaritic mythological tablets. In the following pages we shall remain close to our Ugaritic sources, making only brief incursions into other material when the resultant comparisons are of special importance, or at least new.

The Ugaritic myths explain nature so as to satisfy man's craving for the answers to the universe, and to guarantee the regularity of the processes that result in fertility: fertility of mankind, animals, and plants. The content of the myths

is conveyed through narrative full of action; the ancients were not interested in abstractions. Their thinking was concrete and their gods are portrayed as engaging in lively and significant action. For example, when Baal (the god of fertility and life) and Mot (the god of sterility and death) fight furiously, the action is not only interesting *per se*, but it is significant in that the outcome determines whether the land will be fertile or sterile for a prolonged period.

Fertility is the main concern of the Ugaritic myths. The fertility that the ancients aspired to was within the framework of nature; they wanted each manifestation of fertility in its due season. They wanted nothing (not even blessings such as rain and crops) out of season. What they dreaded was the failure of rain and crops in season. They desired the harvest of barley, wheat, tree fruits, olives, and grapes, each at its normal time. Fertility of the soil is an around-the-year affair without any necessary sterile season in Canaan. Only the component segments of Canaanite fertility (i.e., the successive harvests) are seasonal. Nor is precipitation as a whole seasonal in a good year; for when the winter rain ends, the summer dew begins. Rain is seasonal, and so is the dew. But since, as the texts tell us, Baal grants both rain and dew, he functions as the water-giving god during all twelve months of the year.² Dew (as the ancients knew) is necessary during the summer for the ripening of agricultural products such as grapes (which are harvested down to the end of the rainless summer). Accordingly, the great mass of scholarly writing on Baal, who is supposed to die for the rainless summer and return to life for the rainy winter, misses the point of ancient Near East religion as well as of Near East climate. The ancients wanted the regularity of the normal year, with everything including the rain and dew in its proper season. They dreaded rainless winters, dewless summers, and locust years. A succession of dry or locust years was the terrible scourge that they wanted to avert at all costs. We shall see that the theme of the dying and reviving gods is not seasonal but "sabbatical," having to do with seven-year cycles of fertility and sterility.

The fertility cult was not limited to Baal and his female counterpart Anath. It is true that our longest texts concerning the fertility myths are Baalistic, but it is also a fact that text #52, which deals specifically with this problem, never so much as mentions Baal. In that text El is the prime mover. The prominence of Baal and Anath in the fertility myths is simply a corollary of their general prominence as young, active, and appealing gods. Younger gods tend to be more popular than their elders. Zeus displaced his father Cronus, who had previously displaced his own father Uranus. In Iran, Ahuramazda with the passing of time yielded the limelight to Mithra and Anahita. Accordingly, the quantitative prominence of Baal and Anath vis-à-vis El in the fertility myths, is simply an aspect of their quantitative prominence vis-à-vis the older El in general.

Text #52 opens with the invocation: "Let me proclaim the Good and Gracious Gods," the heptad of fertility deities who are to be sired by El for the purpose of establishing seven-year cycles of abundance. The seven motif, as we shall see, permeates the text. The tablet is divided into sections by horizontal lines drawn by the scribe. The text is in dramatic form, with stage directions, giving the locale and *dramatis personae* for various scenes. The origins of drama are religious, and text #52 is a landmark in the prehistory of classical drama.

The prologue mentions the presence of the dignitaries of the community: civilian and military, ecclesiastical and lay: from the king and queen down. The note of abundance is sounded in line 6:

Eat of every food

Drink of the liquor of every wine!

The second section tells of the compound personage "Death-and-Evil," who holds two scepters: in one hand the staff of bereavement, in the other the staff of widowhood. They hack him down like a vine in its field. Thus section #2 is, so to speak, the reverse side of the coin: in #1 (the prologue) abundance is hailed; in #2 privation is banished.

Section #3 states that something is to be recited, or performed, seven times in keeping with the pervading heptad theme.

Section #4 opens by stating the locale:

*The field is the field of the gods
The field of Asherah and the Girl.*

The Elysian Fields of Ugarit are thus defined as the field of Asherah (consort of El) and the Girl (apparently Anath). There the "Lads" do something over a fire seven times. What they do is the subject of a considerable body of scholarly literature. The text states

*They co[ok a ki]d in milk
A young goat in butter.*

"Milk" and "butter" are certain and parallel each other perfectly. What is in brackets is broken away and restored. "Cook" is only half there, and most of "kid" is missing. Moreover, "*young goat*" is a *hapax legomenon*, with a conjectural translation that cannot be used to bolster the restoration of "kid." The restored passage has been used to establish the Canaanite custom of seething a kid in its mother's milk, against which the Biblical prohibition "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk"³ may have been directed. This prohibition has given rise to the rabbinical insistence that milk and meat must not be eaten together. Since the separation of milk and meat is the cornerstone of Jewish ritual diet, the subject is of wide interest. The above restoration of the Ugaritic passage is possible, but it is so full of hypothetical factors that we will do well to move on without further ado.

The final line of section #4 parallels what we have just quoted, but "fire," written *'isšatu* (which is Semitic) the first time, is now paralleled by the Indo-European *agni* "fire," cognate with Latin *ignis*. The Ugaritic form beginning with *a-* is, however, closer to Sanskrit Agni (familiar to

westerners as the Indian god of fire). This Indo-European word is a concrete reminder that Canaan was already influenced by Indo-Europeans prior to the Amarna Age. This is abundantly borne out by vocabulary, proper names, literature, and institutions as well as the mythology.

With section #5 we read that Rahmai "Lassie" (= Anath) goes and girds (= grapples with) a goodly hero. Anath's engaging in combat is in keeping with her bellicose character of slayer of dragons, game, and men.

Section #6 gives the scene as the Dwellings of the Gods, and specifies another sevenfold ritual.

Section #7 is an expression of zeal for the divine names of some deities called "The Sons of Sharruma," who apparently must be invoked to assure the success of the main section (#10), for which the first nine sections are the build-up.

Section #8 is the invocation to the Good and Gracious Gods who will be born and nurse at the breasts of Asherah. Dignitaries are on hand, bringing good sacrifices to the feast.

Section #9 brings the scene back to the Elysian Fields

The field of the gods

The field of Asherah and Rahmai . . .

and all is ready for the main scene.

Section #10 opens at the seashore where two women are to be created over a fire. El is the aged god, and it is a question whether he will remain impotent, so that the women will function as his daughters and remain childless; or whether he will rise to virility for the occasion so that the women may serve as his wives and bear offspring. The myth, and the drama whereby it was re-enacted, are full of suspense; for El's impotence would mean the onslaught of lean years, whereas his virility would herald the inauguration of a cycle of plentiful years.

El fashions the two women and puts them in his house. His staff (symbolizing his penis) is lowered, but he shoots heavenward, bagging a bird, which is plucked, cleaned, and roasted over the fire. He then tries to copulate with the two

women, whereupon the text brings us to a crisis of suspense, for

*If the women cry "O husband, husband!
Thy rod is lowered
The staff of thy hand has fallen"
While the bird roasts over the fire
Yea broils over the coals,
Then the women are the wives of El
The wives of El and his forever.
But if the women cry "O father, father!
Thy rod is lowered
The staff of thy hand has fallen"
While the bird roasts over the fire
Yea broils over the coals,
The girls are the daughters of El
The daughters of El and his forever.*

Marriage and adoption could be on more, or on less, permanent bases. A marriage contract could permit a short-term union, or call for a permanent and indissoluble marriage. The same variation could hold for daughtership (called *mārtūtu* in Babylonian), a legal state into which a girl could be adopted. The permanence of whatever relationship emerges between El and the two women, is in keeping with the seriousness of the drama; on it depends the long-range fertility of the land. What the women say will determine the future, whether for good or for evil. To the relief and joy of the populace, the women exclaim:

*"O husband, husband!
Thy rod is lowered
The staff of thy hand has fallen"
While the bird roasts over the fire
Yea broils over the coals.
So the two women are the wives of El
El's wives and his forever.*

This guarantees a favorable outcome but not without further suspense, for, as we shall now note, the first children to be

born of the union are not the Heptad but a pair of celestial deities:

*He bends, their lips he kisses
Lo their lips are sweet, sweet as pomegranates.
From kissing, there is conception
From embracing, impregnation.
They go into labor and bear Dawn and Dusk.*

Whatever importance Dawn and Dusk may have in the fertility cult,⁴ they are not the primary gods of fertility, whose functioning is the goal of the text.

The birth of children was announced by messenger to the fathers, who left obstetrics in the feminine hands of the midwives and parturient women.

*Word was brought to El:
"El's wives have borne."*

But El knows the results without having to be told, for he first asks and then answers his own rhetorical question:

*"What have they borne?
My children, Dawn and Dusk."*

Thereafter he joins his wives in conjugal love again. Then he returns to his own abode till the women go into labor and bear him another brood. Word is brought to him, and this time the babes are the Good and Gracious Gods of fertility who suckle the Lady's breasts thereby imbibing the nourishment that provides them with the power for their important role. The newborn gods are voracious giants, with

*A lip to earth,
A lip to heaven
So that there enter their mouth
The fowl of heaven
And fish of the sea.*

El then addresses his seven sons and directs them to the wilderness:

*"There ye shall sojourn among the stones and trees
 Seven full years
 E'en eight circling (years)
 Till ye Good Gods walk the field
 E'en tread the corners of the wilderness."*

Long years of retirement to the wilds among the stones and trees is typical of Indic epic, where beloved heroes do this (often for expiation), pending a happy return to civilization. The seven ("e'en eight"⁵) years of sojourn in the wilderness mean that a bad sabbatical cycle has taken place and, by the process of alternation, a good sabbatical cycle is about to begin. It therefore is likely that text #52 is connected with a ritual to end a succession of lean years and inaugurate a cycle of fat years.

We now approach the happy ending. The seven lean years are over and the Good Gods are ready to enter the Sown, where the Guardian who is to let them in, is stationed.

*They met the Guardian of the Sown
 And shouted to the Guardian of the Sown:
 "O Guardian, Guardian, open!"
 And he opened an aperture for them so that they entered.*

They then ask for the entertainment due to strangers:

*"If there is bread, give that we may eat.
 If there is wine, give that we may drink."*

The Guardian answered that there were both food and drink, and the text ends on the affirmation of plenty.

Text #52 thus reflects a religious ritual for initiating a seven-year period of plenty. The form is dramatic and was doubtless acted out. Our text is the libretto with stage directions. The authority that is invoked to produce the results is a myth: the story of how El procreated the Heptad who preside over the plenteous sabbatical cycle, and how they auspiciously entered the arable terrain bringing their blessings to it. The myth is the precedent to be invoked for re-establishing *in time* the primeval event. We thus have the

myth, the verbal utterance and the act: the complete formula for agricultural prosperity (without any trace of the Baal cult).

Quantitatively the Baal and Anath texts form the bulk of the fertility myths from Ugarit, in keeping with the popularity of those younger gods in the religion of Canaan. About a dozen tablets deal with Baal and Anath myths, but there is no proof that they were intended to constitute a single composition. When we group them as parts of "The Baal and Anath Cycle" we do so as a matter of practical expedience. We must discuss them in some order, and we try to arrange them in the most meaningful sequence. And yet no sequence can claim to be the one and only sequence that a Ugaritic priest would have prescribed.

One of the main themes in the mythology is kingship among the gods. Just as Zeus wrested the kingship of the gods from Cronus, and the latter from Uranus, Baal wrested the kingship from the sea-god Yamm. Text #137 tells how the pantheon was assembled under the presidency of El, when Yamm sent his messengers with the insolent request that Baal be surrendered to him in bondage:

*So says Yamm your lord
Your master, Judge River:
"O gods, give up him whom ye harbor
Him whom the multitudes harbor;
Give up Baal and his partisans
Dagon's Son, that I may inherit his gold."*

The gods were seated for banqueting, when Baal spied the messengers coming. The gods, anticipating the unpleasant message, bent their heads in sadness; but Baal, showing the courage befitting the king-to-be, took his stand by El.

*As soon as the gods saw them
Yea saw the messengers of Yamm
The emissaries of Judge River,
The gods lowered their heads on top of their knees
E'en on the thrones of their lordships.*

Baal rebuked them:

"*Why have ye lowered, O gods,
Your heads on top of your knees
E'en on the thrones of your lordships?*

Let the gods twain read the tablets

E'en the messengers of Yamm

The emissaries of Judge River:

Lift, O gods, your heads

From on top of your knees

From the thrones of your lordships

And I shall answer Yamm's messengers

The emissaries of Judge River."

Baal's leadership commands the respect of the gods, who react by obeying him:

The gods lift their heads

From on top of their knees

From the thrones of their lordships.

The messengers twain arrive and fail to pay obeisance to the head of the pantheon:

At the feet of El they do not fall

Nor prostrate themselves in the gathered assemblage.

Baal is already meditating violent revenge in his heart. He has a sharpened sword with flashing blade. Messengers (as in the Homeric world) had a kind of diplomatic immunity, so that no matter how great the provocation, Baal had no right to vent the violence of his feelings on them. The scene we are about to witness is a forerunner of an episode in the *Iliad* (1:188-222), where Achilles is about to slay Agamemnon because of Agamemnon's insolent demands, but two goddesses restrain him. Just as Achilles yields for the time being, so too does Baal. In fact El abjectly surrenders him:

El, Bull of his father, replies:

"Baal is thy slave, O Yamm,

Baal is thy slave forever

Dagon's Son, thy bondsman.

*He will bring thy tribute like the gods
Yea bring thine offerings like the sons of holiness."*

Thus betrayed by the cowardice of the venerable but senile Father of the Gods, Baal flies into a rage and

*[Seiz]es [a knife] in his hand
A butcher knife in his right
To slay the messengers - - -*

whereupon

*[Ana]th grabs [his right hand]
Yea Astarte grabs his left*

and tell him that he must not slay the emissaries of Yamm. The text breaks off after a few fragmentary lines. It is possible that the goddesses told Baal to bide his time and things would turn out in his favor, even as Hera and Athena advised Achilles, who, in obedience to them, refrained from slaying Agamemnon.

Baal's opportunity came. Text #68 tells how he vanquished Yamm and from him seized the kingship. The divine craftsman, Kothar-and-Hasis, fashioned two clubs and gave them to Baal for conquering Yamm. The need for two clubs is a corollary of the ancient psychology that required climactic action: the first club would strike a preliminary blow; the second would deal the final and crushing blow. Kothar-and-Hasis predicts to Baal the victorious outcome of the battle:

*"Am I not telling thee, O Prince Baal,
Yea declaring, O Rider of Clouds?
Lo, thine enemies, O Baal
Lo thine enemies shalt thou smite
Lo thou shalt destroy thy foes!
Thou shalt take thine eternal kingship
Thine everlasting sovereignty!"*

Then the divine craftsman gives the clubs their appropriate names:

*Kothar brings down two clubs and proclaims their names:
"Thy name is Driver.*

Driver, drive Yamm

Drive Yamm from his throne

River from the seat of his sovereignty!

Thou shalt swoop from the hand of Baal

Like a falcon from his fingers!

Strike the shoulders of Prince Sea

Between the hands of Judge River!"

Note that the imagery is in terms of falconry. The clubs will fly from the hand of Baal and strike his enemy Yamm, just as a falcon swoops from the hunter's hand to catch the prey. The expression "between the hands" means "on the back" in Hebrew as well as in Ugaritic. The "creative word"⁶ of Kothar-and-Hasis is immediately translated into action:

The club swoops from the hand of Baal

Like a falcon from his fingers

It strikes the shoulders of Prince Yamm

Between the hands of Judge River.

But Yamm is not felled by the blow and still remains in the fray. So Kothar-and-Hasis names the next club "Expeller" and commands it to fly from the hand of Baal and deal Yamm the knockout blow on the head:

So it swoops from the hand of Baal

Like a falcon from his fingers.

It strikes the head of Prince Yamm

Between the eyes of Judge River.

Sea sprawls and falls to earth - - -

Baal thus conquered Yamm and wrested from him the kingship of the gods.

Victory, however, often leaves a host of new problems in its wake for the victor. On this occasion, immediately after the victory, Astarte rebukes Baal for slaying Yamm. Baal is now king, but his future is fraught with vicissitudes as the mythology before us will bring out.

Text #75 tells of Baal's encounter with ravenous monsters in the wilderness. The weird creatures (part bovine, part anthropomorphic) are reminiscent of the Aegean Minotaur on the one hand and of the Mesopotamian Bull of Heaven on the other:

*On them are horns like bulls
And humps like buffaloes
And on them is the face of Baal.*

The text is fragmentary with many of the line-ends missing. That the sabbatical cycle of fertility is an underlying motif is, however, clear from passages like the following:

*Seven years the god is full - - -
Even eight circling years, till - - -*

Then Baal perished and the years of sterility came on, for we read:

*Thus Baal fell - - - like a bull
Yea Hadd collapsed - - - - - .*

Baal had many ups and downs, slain for many a cycle of sterility and privation, and risen for many a cycle of fertility and plenty. The multiplicity of his ups and downs is required by nature itself in the Near East. Canaan is characterized by a succession of seasons that normally produce a fertile year. With some luck a number of such fertile years follow one after the other to form a fertile cycle. But unfortunately, rain does not always materialize in the rainy season; nor is there always sufficient dew in the summer. Moreover, locusts may plague the land and devour the crops. A series of bad years is the major natural catastrophe against which the fertility cult was directed. The meteorological history of Canaan, where Baal was pitted against Mot in the minds of the people, required the concept that the conflict between the two gods took place repeatedly. In the frame of reference of Canaanite religious psychology, each of the two gods was both vanquished and triumphant many a time in the course of any century.

One of the larger subdivisions of "The Baal and Anath Cycle" is called the "Anath" text, which opens with a banquet scene of the gods. Baal is honored on the occasion with roasted meat cut with a keen blade from the breast of a fatling. Also

*A cup is placed in his hand
An amphora in both his hands.*

Asherah, consort of El and mother of "the seventy gods," graces the occasion. Wine flows in profusion:

*They take a thousand pitchers of wine
Ten thousand they mix of its mixture.*

Like the Greeks in Homer, the Canaanites often cut their wine, and enhanced the pleasures of roast meat and mixed wine with music and song:

*(A lad) began to sing and chant
With cymbals, a goodly song
The lad good of voice chanted.*

Thereafter

*Baal went up into the heights of Saphon
Baal viewed his girls
He eyed Pidrai, Girl of Light,
Also Tallai, Girl of Rain,*
-----.

The daughters of Baal, as we know from several Ugaritic passages, are three in number: Pidrai, Tallai, and Arsai. They are appropriately nature goddesses: Pidrai symbolizing light; Tallai, dew and rain; Arsai, earth. Some scholars insist that they are not the daughters but the consorts of Baal. The texts call them Baal's *bandt-*, which means primarily "daughters" and secondarily "girls." Since the triad of Baal's daughters is reflected in the triad of Allah's daughters according to the pre-Islamic Arabs,⁷ there is some outside confirmation that the three goddesses are daughters of Baal. This does not rule out their serving as his consorts as well, because the

ambivalence of relationships in an ancient pantheon may be remote indeed from the familiar patterns of human society.

Col. II begins with a reference to the scent of game, around the double doors of Anath's house. This is appropriate because she is a goddess of the hunt and of battle. Suddenly troops confront her:

*And lo Anath fights violently
She slays the sons of the two cities
She fights the people of the seashore
Annihilates mankind of the sunrise.*

The reference to the people of the west (seashore) and east (sunrise) is a common idiom called a "merism" or combination of antonyms to indicate totality (like our English "they came great and small," which means "everybody came"). Accordingly, Anath is said to be slaying "everyone." The scene we are about to witness is a parallel to the Egyptian (rather than Mesopotamian) story of the near-destruction of mankind. The Mesopotamians (followed by the Hebrews) conceived of the near-destruction of mankind at the hands of the god(s) in terms of a deluge. But the Egyptians had a myth about a brutal goddess, Sekhmet, who went berserk and would have exterminated the human race had she not been stopped before it was too late. Ugaritic mythology, confronting us with a variant of this tradition, tells of how the violent Anath slew men and exulted as their cut-off heads and hands flew through the air:

*Under her (flew) heads like vultures
Over her (flew) hands like locusts.*

Again, note the merism; "under" and "over" indicate "everywhere" about her. The ancient Near Easterners used to cut off heads and hands to count, and boast of, their victims slain in battle. Heads and hands are therefore symbols of victory, figuring in the art as well as texts of the Near East. Our present text is paralleled by Syrian seal cylinders of the Amarna Age, showing the victorious goddess with heads and hands filling the atmosphere.

Sekhmet of Egypt was stopped by flooding the area with beer dyed blood-red with ocher. The bloodthirsty Sekhmet, mistaking the reddened beer for blood, drank her fill and was put to sleep by the beer. Anath, somewhat similarly, is depicted as wading in the blood of her human victims:

*She plunges knee-deep in the blood of heroes
Neck-high in the gore of troops.*

She battles on with club and bow until she reaches her palace. At this point we are confronted with a typical feature of the literature. All the fighting so far is merely the first round. Another scene, paralleling this one, will come later and tell of the climax (i.e., final victory). So our text states that on this first round "she was not sated." She thereupon renews the battle, adding new tactics:

*She fights violently
Battles the sons of the two cities
She hurls chairs at the soldiers,
Hurling tables at the armies
Footstools at the troops.*

Brawl tactics, specifically the throwing of furniture, are famous from Odysseus' battle against the suitors in his halls at Ithaca. In Psalm 23:5, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" may mean that God provides His own with ammunition.

With her tactics in the second round, Anath scores the victory and is overjoyed at the massacre she has wrought:

*Much she fights, and looks;
Slays, and views.
Anath swells her liver with laughter
Her heart is filled with joy
For in the hand of Anath is victory.
For she plunged knee-deep in the blood of soldiers
Neck-high in the gore of troops.
Until she is sated
She fights in the house
Battles between the tables.*

The parallel with the *Odyssey* is many-sided. Anath is depicted returning from the hunt, trying to enter her own palace, which is occupied by intruders. Her first battle, out of doors, does not end with her in full possession of her premises. But the second battle, concluded indoors, leads to her repossessing her palace. Both the tactics of furniture throwing, and the massacre of the intruders to repossess one's own palace, jibe with Odysseus' victory in his halls. After her victory Anath first

*Washes her hands in the blood of soldiers
Her fingers in the gore of troops.*

But the blessings of peace follow the ravages of war:

*She draws water and washes:
Dew of heaven
Fat of earth
Rain of the Rider of Clouds.*

All of the myths we are discussing lead up to the theme of nature functioning with regularity and benevolence to bless mankind with fertility. The formula "dew of heaven and fat of earth" recurs in the blessings of Isaac. "Rider of Clouds" refers to Baal in Ugaritic, but to Yahwe in Psalm 68:5.

The acts of Anath bring on the corresponding functions of nature:

*Dew that the heavens pour
Rain that the stars pour.*

The text goes on to tell of the abundance of game too.

Baal next dispatches his messengers to Anath, telling her to lay aside warfare and establish peace, promising her to reveal the secret of nature if she will come to his mountain abode:

*The message of Aliyan Baal
The word of Aliy the Mighty:

(Bury) enmity in the earth of battles*

Put mandrakes in the dust

*Pour (a) peace (offering) into the midst of the earth,
Conciliation into the midst of the fields*

To me let thy feet race

To me let thy legs hasten,

For I have a word to tell thee

An utterance, to declare unto thee:

The word of the tree and the whisper of the stone

The sound of the heavens to the earth

Of the Deep to the stars.

I understand lightning which the heavens do not know

The word which men do not know

Nor the multitudes of the earth understand.

Come and I shall reveal it

In the midst of the mountain of me, God of Saphon

In the sanctuary, in the mountain of mine inheritance

In the Good Place, on the Hill of Power."

When Anath beholds the messengers coming she is stricken by misgivings that some ill may have befallen Baal. Before they have time to deliver their joyous message Anath

Lifts her voice and shouts:

"Why have Gupan and Ugar come?

What foe has risen against Baal

Or enemy against the Rider of Clouds?"

Anath then recounts her past victories over Baal's enemies. Those battles symbolize the triumph of the forces of good (or life) over the forces of evil (or death).

"Have I not crushed Yamm, El's Darling,

Nor annihilated the great god River?

Have I not muzzled the dragon

Nor crushed the crooked serpent

Mighty monster of the seven heads?

I have crushed Mot, darling of the earth gods

I have destroyed the house of El-Zebub

*I have battled and gained possession of the gold of those
who (once) drove Baal from the heights of
Saphon - - - ."*

The sea-gods figure prominently among the foes of Baal, lord of earth and fertility. The dragon (*tannin*) is well known from Scripture. The crooked serpent is none other than Leviathan, who is actually named as such in other Ugaritic texts that we shall presently examine. His seven heads give the number of the heads that God crushed according to Psalm 74:14 ("Thou hast crushed the heads of Leviathan"). In Revelation 12:3 ff. the seven-headed monster of evil that emerges from the sea is a reflex of the old Leviathan myth and symbolized the evil to be vanquished by God. Later still, in the Aramaic incantation bowls (from about A.D. 500 in Babylonia), magicians invoked the precedent of God's conquest of Leviathan, to dispel the forces of evil from the homes of their clients.⁸ All this has a bearing on New Testament and various forms of Jewish dualism (N.B. the Qumran Scrolls⁹), whereby the forces of good (or light or God) are pitted against the forces of evil (or darkness or Satan). This is frequently attributed to borrowing from Zoroastrianism. But, as we now see, the myth of the dualistic battle was deeply entrenched in Canaan from pre-Hebraic times. The myth of the conflict was absorbed by the Hebrews along with the language, literature, and lore of Canaan from the very start of Hebrew history in Canaan. We know the parallel (and related) myth of the Greeks, about the seven- (or nine-) headed Hydra slain by Heracles. The earliest attestation of the myth is a seal cylinder from Mesopotamia of the third millennium B.C. (Dynasty of Akkad) showing heroes vanquishing the seven-headed monster.¹⁰ Accordingly, all the available evidence points to the spread of this dualistic myth from the Semitic to the Iranian sphere, not vice versa. That Iranian back-influence may have heightened the already existing dualistic tendencies in the Semitic world is quite likely, starting with the Achaemenian Conquest and continuing into

Roman times; but that is very different from attributing the origin of Christian dualistic tendencies to non-Jewish sources.

Mot ("Death") is the most prominent adversary of Baal. He appears often enough in Hebrew poetry, and his cult is reflected in the early Hebrew name Az-mawet¹¹ ("Mot-Is-Strong"). Appeasing the forces of evil, as well as adoring the forces of good, is familiar in many religions (cf. the cults of the lethal Nergal in Mesopotamia, and of the evil Seth in Egypt).

El-Zebub, as we have noted above, is already an evil deity. He reverberates as Baal-Zebub,¹² the prince of the demons in the New Testament.¹³

The gold guarded by dragons on mountains is a common motif in Indo-European epic.

Anath ends her address to Gupan and Ugar by concluding her tale of conquests over Baal's foes, who had once

Driven him from the seat of his kingship

From the dais, from the throne of his sovereignty . . .

and she asks

*"What enemy has arisen against Baal
Or foe against the Rider of Clouds?"*

The messengers allay her fears:

*"No enemy has arisen against Baal
Nor foe against the Rider of Clouds."*

Then they deliver the message and invitation, repeating the very words put into their mouths by Baal, as quoted above.

The secret that Baal offers to reveal to Anath is the word of nature. The passage describing it is one of the finest in Ugaritic, anticipating the Scriptural formulation of the same idea: "The heavens declare the glory of God, yea the firmament tells of His handiwork. Day utters word to day; and night imparts knowledge to night. There is neither utterance nor words whose sound is unheard. Throughout all the land their sound goes forth; at the end of the world are their

words" (Psalm 19:2-5). In Canaan, whether at Ugarit or in Israel, the poets heard the voice of nature; heavens and earth talked to them, revealing the glorious mystery of the god(s) and creation. For those ancients, nature was animate; with the segments thereof conversing in words that the initiated could understand.

Anath accepts the invitation, and instead of wasting time sending further messages back and forth, she decides to race ahead of Gupan and Ugar.

*Then she sets face toward Baal
On the heights of Saphon
By the thousand acres
Yea myriad hectares.*

This formula expresses the speed at which gods travel. All too prosaically, it could be rendered "by leaps and bounds."

Baal entertains Anath, upon her arrival, with roasted ox and fatling. She draws water and washes with

*Dew of heaven, fat of earth
Dew that the heavens pour
Rain that the stars pour . . .*

and game abounds because of her felicity; for she is the Lady of fertility and of the hunt.

Baal's invitation is not without ulterior motive. In exchange for his secret he wants Anath to intercede on his behalf to get a palace. Diplomacy in divine circles is as devious as among men. Baal's tactics were to get Anath to appeal to Asherah to ask El, the head of the pantheon, to authorize Kothar-and-Hasis to construct a palace for Baal. Baal was the only important god without a palace of his own. His newly won kingship required his possessing one. His plea included the statement that just about all the gods had palaces:

*"There is the dwelling of El, the shelter of his sons
The dwelling of Lady Asherah of the Sea*

*The dwelling of Pidrai, Girl of Light,
 The shelter of Tallai, Girl of Rain,
 The dwelling of Arsai, Girl of Y'bdr
 The dwelling of the famed brides."*

Anath assures Baal that she will, if necessary, compel El to grant the request, by dire threats of violence.

*"And the Virgin Anath declared:
 'The Bull, God of my father, will yield
 He will yield for my sake and his own
 For I shall trample him like a sheep on the ground
 Make his gray hair flow with blood
 The gray of his beard with gore
 Unless he grants Baal a house like the gods
 Yea a court like the sons of Asherah!'"*

Anath then departs for the abode of El where the two cosmic rivers, the sources of the Two Deeps, have their origin. There she threatens her aged sire with physical violence. El, afraid of his brutal daughter, has hidden in the innermost chamber: the eighth chamber within a chamber.

*El answers from seven chambers
 Out of eight compartments:
 "I know thee to be impetuous, O my daughter,
 For there is no restraint among goddesses.
 What dost thou desire, O Virgin Anath?"*

Now that El has been cowed into granting whatever she wants, Anath can afford to be filial and give up her crude tactics:

*And the Virgin Anath replied:
 "Thy word, O El, is wise
 Thy wisdom, unto eternity
 Lucky life is thy word.
 Our king is Aliyan Baal
 Our judge, above whom there is none."*

Anath's appeal was carefully planned. Asherah and her brood were already there to add their voices to Anath's in getting El's authorization for building Baal's palace:

*There shout Asherah and her sons
The Goddess and the band of her kin:
"Baal has no house like the gods
Nor a court like the sons of Asherah."*

Vociferously they remind El that practically every god except Baal, who is now king, has a palace. El has no choice but to authorize the construction.

Asherah's messengers, Holy and Blessed, are dispatched to Caphtor, where Kothar-and-Hasis has his atelier. They are to convey to the divine craftsman El's orders to erect the palace.

Text #51 takes up the story. Like Hephaistus busy at his forge when Thetis comes to request armor for Achilles, so too Kothar-and-Hasis is described at work making fine objects in his atelier:

*The skilled one went up to his bellows.
In the hands of Hasis were the tongs.
He pours silver
Casts gold
He pours silver by the thousand (shekels)
Gold he pours by the myriad.*

The text then enumerates the handsome creations he is making: a table, a footstool, shoes, a bowl, etc.—all fit for the gods.

The construction of Baal's mythical house is a forerunner of the erection of Yahwe's historical First Temple in Jerusalem. The two accounts are organically related because of common background and attitudes. In both cases the god's interests had grown to a point where he could not condignly go on any more without a house. The Bible tells that it was no longer fitting that Israel's king should dwell in a cedar palace while God still lived in a tent (The Tabernacle). Times had changed; Israel had arrived; with the added

stature of Israel among the nations, the cultic requirements for Israel's God rose. We have seen how Baal's rise to kingship required the building of a palace for him. The Biblical and Ugaritic accounts of the building materials (cedars of Lebanon covered with metal) also link the mythical and historic houses of Baal and Yahwe, respectively.

The definitive authorization is sent through Anath to Baal with instructions to invite certain creatures (their identity is not yet clear, for we cannot translate their names) whereupon nature itself will fetch the building materials for him. Anath, overjoyed, darts through space to the heights of Saphon to tell the good news to Baal:

*"Be informed, O Baal!
I bring thy tidings.
A house will be built for thee like thy brethren
Even a court, like thy kin.
Invite - - - - into thine house
- - - - in the midst of thy palace
So that the mountains will bring thee much silver
The hills, the choicest of gold
And build a house of silver and gold
A house of lapis gems."*

The combination of silver, gold, and lapis lazuli is familiar from Egyptian and Sumerian mythological texts, too. It is a reflection of actual art that gloried in the color scheme produced by the three materials.

Baal now summoned the divine builder.

*After Kothar-and-Hasis arrived
He set an ox before him
A fatling in the midst of his presence.
A throne was set so that he might sit
At the right hand of Aliyan Baal
Until he had eaten and drunk.*

After wining and dining the guest Baal got down to business and instructed Kothar-and-Hasis to build the palace promptly

*"in the midst of the heights of Saphon.
The house shall comprise a thousand acres
The palace, ten thousand hectares."*

But a major disagreement arose between Baal and Kothar-and-Hasis as to whether the palace should have a window. A new type of building was coming into vogue: "the window house" (called *bit-hi(l)lāni* in Babylonian). The divine architect recommended this new type of building with a window; Baal, however, stubbornly objected to windows. Finally the architect prevailed, with the consequence that Baal's adversary Mot entered Baal's palace through the window. Mot's (i.e., Death's) entrance through windows is a theme reflected in Jeremiah 9:20. The dialogue between Baal and Kothar follows:

*And Kothar-and-Hasis declared:
"Hear, O Aliyan Baal,
Perceive, O Rider of Clouds!
Shall I not put a window in the house
A casement in the midst of the palace?"
And Aliyan Baal replied:
"Do not put a window in the house
A casement in the midst of the palace!"
And Kothar-and-Hasis replied:
"Thou wilt come around, Baal, to my word."*

Kothar then repeated his advice, but Baal would not be budged and added that he had three girls (Pidrai, Tallai, and Arsai), whom he presumably did not want to expose to any outsider through windows.

From the majestic trees of Lebanon, and the choicest cedars of Antilebanon, the palace was erected. Then a mighty conflagration (which we are to compare with the "fire of Hephaistus") is applied to the house for a week, at the end of which the palace emerged resplendent with gold and silver. This may reflect a process of melting and applying precious metal to sheath the wood and bricks, giving the illusion of a house built of solid gold and silver. When the process was completed

*Aliyan Baal rejoiced:
"I have built my house of silver
Yea made my palace of gold."*

Thereupon Baal made a great feast to commemorate the event, slaughtering bulls, sheep, and goats, fatlings and yearling calves to regale his guests.

*He invited his brethren into his house
His kin into his palace.
He invited the seventy sons of Asherah.*

He also invited specialized deities: personified animals and objects, some of which are paralleled in other literatures of the East Mediterranean. Homer tells of animated tripods that come to, and go from, the banquets of the gods, automatically. This parallels the deified pithoi in the following passage. In Hittite rituals, thrones are personified quite as in the following:

*(Baal) caused the ram gods to drink wine;
Caused the ewe goddesses to drink wine.
He caused the bull gods to drink wine;
Caused the cow goddesses to drink wine.
He caused the chair gods to drink wine;
Caused the throne goddesses to drink wine.
He caused the pithos gods to drink wine;
Caused the jar goddesses to drink wine.*

Note how each category comes in parallel pairs, male and female, giving poetic form to what would otherwise be a prosaic list. The text adds that the wining and dining continued

*Till the gods had eaten and drunk
And the twain who suck the breast had quaffed.*

The twain are the two deified kings. As in Homer, the kings at Ugarit were accorded divine status. Note that dyarchy existed at Ugarit, somewhat as at Sparta. The institution at

both sites would appear to be the legacy of a common Aegean heritage. On a carved panel on the royal bedstead from Ugarit, two princes or kings are depicted sucking the breasts of a goddess, thereby imbibing the milk that imparts divinity to them.¹⁴ The kings of Ugarit therefore have a place in the pantheon. It is part and parcel of the epic that kings should move in divine as well as in human circles; cf. Homer, the Gilgamesh Epic, and the Patriarchal Narratives in Genesis.

After the banquet, Baal sallied forth and captured ninety cities. His conquests inspired him with so much confidence that he felt secure enough to have a window installed in his house.

And Aliyan Baal declared:

*"I'll install (it), Kothar son of Yamm,
Yea Kothar, son of the Assemblage.
Let a window be opened in the house
A casement in the midst of the palace."*

Thus Baal did come around to following Kothar's advice.

*Kothar-and-Hasis laughed.
He lifted his voice and shouted:
"Did I not tell thee, O Aliyan Baal,
Thou wouldst come around, O Baal, to my word?"
He opens a window in the house
A casement in the midst of the palace.*

All this is connected with the functioning of Baal as the storm-god, because a rain- and thunderstorm ensue. Perhaps it is somehow connected with the "windows" of heaven mentioned in Genesis 7:11 as the source of rain.

At this seemingly happy juncture, trouble looms ominously for Baal. His foes seize the forest and mountainsides, and his archenemy Mot resolves on wresting the kingship for himself, saying

*"I alone am he who will rule over the gods
Even command gods and men
Dominate the multitudes of the earth."*

Baal is obliged to communicate with Mot in the underworld, but warns his messengers, Gupan and Ugar, to beware of Mot lest he swallow them alive:

*"Do not draw near to the god Mot
Lest he make you like a lamb in his mouth
Yea like a kid in his gullet."*

The negotiations end in the confrontation of Baal and Mot in the underworld as we read in text #67. Mot's summoning of Baal is connected with Baal's conquest of the seven-headed Leviathan. Perhaps Mot felt sympathy for the forces of evil, since he was after all destructive like them. On being summoned, Baal is terrified of Mot, and all nature becomes, as a result, unproductive.

*Aliyan Baal feared him
The Rider of Clouds dreaded him.
Word went back to the god Mot,
Was relayed to the Hero, El's beloved:
"The message of Aliyan Baal
The reply of the Mighty Warrior:
'Hail, O god Mot!
I am thy slave, e'en thine forever.'"
The two (messenger) gods departed
Nor did they sit.
Then they set face toward the god Mot
In the midst of his city Hamrai.
Lo the throne on which he sits
Is the land of his inheritance.
The twain lift their voices and shout:
"The message of Aliyan Baal
The reply of the Mighty Warrior:
'Hail, O deity Mot!
I am thy slave, e'en thine forever.'"
The deity Mot rejoiced.*

The capitulation of Baal is complete, since he becomes by his own declaration the slave of Mot in perpetuity. In the Old

Testament there are two kinds of slaves: the native (Hebrew) slave who has the right to go free in the seventh (or sabbatical) year; and the eternal slave, who never becomes free of his master.

Baal's capitulation meant his descent to Mot and to death. But before doing so, Baal copulated with a heifer who bore him a tauromorphic son. Then we find Baal fallen dead on the earth. When a pair of messengers bear the sad tidings to the head of the pantheon (El, or Latpan):

*Thereupon Latpan god of mercy
Goes down from his throne
Sits on the footstool
And from the footstool sits on the earth.
He pours the ashes of mourning on his head
Yea the dust of scattering on his pate.*

El also dons a special garb for mourning and lacerates himself, wandering in grief through mountains and forest. Anath too wanders in grief until she comes upon the corpse of Baal lying on the earth. With the help of the sun-goddess, Shapsh, Anath removes the corpse to the heights of Saphon for burial with numerous sacrifices in his honor.

Anath then proceeds to the abode of El and Asherah, and (in text #49)

*She raises her voice and shouts:
"Let Asherah and her sons rejoice
E'en the goddess and the band of her kin
For Aliyan Baal is dead
The Prince, Lord of Earth, has perished."*

It will be noted that this mythology is cosmic, not local. Baal is the Lord of the entire Earth, not the Baal of Ugarit, Byblos, Tyre, or Sidon. El and Asherah are the chief god and goddess of the whole pantheon. Baal and Anath are the universal gods of fertility. And so forth.

The news that Baal is dead meant that another god would have to be appointed king in his stead. El and Asherah finally

decide on their son Athtar the Terrible as king to replace Baal:

*Thereupon Athtar the Terrible
Goes up into the heights of Saphon
Yea sits on the throne of Aliyan Baal.
His feet do not reach the footstool
His head does not reach its top.
So Athtar the Terrible says:
"I cannot be king in the heights of Saphon."
Athtar the Terrible goes down
Goes down from the throne of Aliyan Baal
To be king over all the grand earth.*

Though Athtar became king of the earth, he was unequal to the magnitude of Baal's kingship in Saphon, as the inadequacy of his physical stature indicated.

Meanwhile Anath nursed her desire for vengeance on Baal's slayer. Eventually she asks Mot for her brother Baal and Mot admits his guilt, whereupon

*She seizes the god Mot
With a sword she cleaves him
With a fan she winnows him
With fire she burns him
In the millstones she grinds him
In the field she plants him.*

Mot is thus destroyed, but his being planted in the ground is somehow connected with the future growth of the soil. Perhaps the fact that he had swallowed Baal explains why Mot's body can function as seed giving rise to life.

The planting of Mot is the prelude to the resurrection of Baal. El himself anticipates the joyous moment, but even the chief of the pantheon depends on dreams for information. When El dreams of nature functioning with abundance, he will know that Baal has come back to life:

*In a dream of Latpan god of mercy
In a vision of the Creator of Creatures*

*The heavens rain oil
 The wadies flow with honey.
 Latpan, god of mercy, rejoices
 His feet on the footstool he sets
 He cracks a smile and laughs
 He raises his voice and shouts:
 "Let me sit and rest
 So that my soul may repose in my breast
 Because Aliyan Baal is alive
 Because the Prince, Lord of Earth, exists."*

Shapsh, the sun-goddess who sees all, is dispatched to find Baal. When she finds him, he is battling once more with Mot. Baal had attacked Mot, knocked him to the ground, and forced him from the throne of his kingship for seven years. And now, in the seventh year, Mot accuses Baal of having subjected him to seven years of annihilation. From Mot's words, he apparently is referring to what Anath did to him to avenge Baal:

*"On account of thee, O Baal, I have seen shame
 On account of thee I have seen scattering by the sword
 On account of thee I have seen burning by fire
 On account of thee I have seen grinding in the millstones
 -----"*

Soon Mot and Baal are again locked in mortal combat:

*They tangle like hippopotamuses
 Mot is strong, Baal is strong.
 They gore like buffaloes
 Mot is strong, Baal is strong.
 They bite like serpents
 Mot is strong, Baal is strong.
 They kick like racers
 Mot is down, Baal is down.*

As the fight is thus fought to a draw, Shapsh arrives and intimidates Mot with the threat of El's punishment on Baal's behalf:

*"Hear, O god Mot!
 How canst thou fight with Aliyan Baal?
 How will the Bull, god of thy father, not hear thee?
 Will he not remove the supports of thy seat
 Nor upset the throne of thy kingship
 And break the scepter of thy rule?"
 The god Mot was afraid
 The Hero, beloved of El, was scared.*

There are other Baal and Anath fragments. As long as nature continues to function and to malfunction, the conflict of Baal and Mot continues. The aim of the cult was always to secure the victory of Baal over Mot, to usher in a seven-year cycle of plenty, so that the populace may enjoy the blessings of abundance.

As we have already noted, the fertility cult transcended Baalism. Text #77 is lunar, dealing with the marriage of Yarih ("Moon") with the Mesopotamian lunar goddess Nikkal (from Sumerian Nin-gal). The wedding is to result in fertility symbolized as the child that the bride will bear to the groom. The text is divided by a scribal line into two sections. The first part is essentially of masculine interest, and deals with the groom's courtship and payment of the marriage price. The second part has to do with the ladies and the bride's dowry. We may close our discussion of Ugaritic mythology with Yarih's proposal of marriage:

*"I shall pay her bride price to her father:
 A thousand (shekels) of silver
 E'en ten thousand of gold.
 I shall send jewels of lapis-lazuli.
 I shall make her fields into vineyards
 The field of her love into orchards."*

The handsome price is of course beyond the range of normal human ability to pay, but the term *muhr* ("bride price") is taken from real life. Moreover, his promise to make her fertile reflects the real attitude toward marriage, whose purpose was human fertility. A husband was like a farmer who culti-

vates the soil so that it yields a harvest. A woman, like a field, needs the seed and cultivation of a husband, if she is to be fertile. Our text is therefore a *hieros gamos*: a wedding of the gods, whose fertility brings on terrestrial abundance for mankind.

The mythology of Canaan is important in more ways than one. Its chief significance lies in its effect on ancient Israel. Both where the Old Testament incorporates it, and where the Old Testament reacts against it, Canaanite mythology continues to exert its impact upon us through the Bible.

NOTES

1. The translations in the following pages have been newly made from the Ugaritic texts in my *Ugaritic Manual*, Rome, 1955. Some additional mythological fragments have since appeared in Ch. Virolleaud, *Palais royal d'Ugarit II*, Paris, 1957.
2. *Ugaritic Manual*, pp. 269–70 (§20.766).
3. Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21.
4. *Šahar* ("Dawn" or "Morning Star") is also connected with the rains of fertility in Hosea 6:3. The imagery of text #52, wherein God impregnates two human wives, reverberates in the Hebrew prophets; cf. Ezekiel 23 (N.B. v. 4) and Hosea *passim* (e.g., 1:2 followed by 3:1). Hosea connects this theme with agricultural fertility; for depending on the relationship of the women to Him, God either gives or withholds food and drink (Hosea 2:10–11).
5. These numbers are not used as loosely as meets the eye. For while ordinarily there is no eighth year in the sabbatical cycle, twice in a century there is in a peculiar way. Each jubilee ends with a sabbatical cycle in which the seventh year thereof (= the forty-ninth of the jubilee cycle) calls for the land to lie fallow; and then that year is followed by another in which the land is again to lie fallow. Accordingly the worst sabbatical cycle is a sterile seventh cycle the seventh year of which is climaxed by the eighth sterile year. See Leviticus 25.

6. The concept of the creative word is familiar from the first chapter of Genesis. The Creation was effected neither by work, nor with materials, nor by tools. God simply says, "Let there be *x*," and *x* comes into existence.
7. See *Moslem World* XXXIII, No. 1, 1943, for "The Daughters of Baal and Allah."
8. See *Orientalia* XXII, 1953, pp. 243-44.
9. I have surveyed the basic ideas and bibliography of the Scrolls in *Adventures in the Nearest East*, London, 1957, pp. 132-43; and "Selected Books on the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Jewish Book Annual* XVII, 1959-60, pp. 12-18.
10. See my *The Living Past*, New York, 1941, Chapter VI, seal #14.
11. II Samuel 23:31; I Chronicles 8:36; 9:42; 11:33; 12:3; 27:25.
12. II Kings 1:2, 3, 6, 16.
13. For Beelzebub, see Matthew 12:24.
14. See *Antiquity* XXIX, 1955, pp. 147-49, and Plate VII.

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